

26 March 1981

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Quality of Analysis

1. The problem with the quality of analysis in NFAC is not organization or even unconscious bias, it is people. There are some good analysts and a few who are very good, but far too many have trouble doing their basic analytical job and communicating the results cleanly and clearly. Many analysts can sort through and summarize sources, but few can conceptualize, recognize turning points when they occur, or speak in a timely fashion to the preoccupations of policymakers.

2. To cure this problem will require a good decade. There are two basic matters that must be tackled. The first is to change the culture of NFAC as it is now constituted. The second and long-term approach involves a different recruiting policy.

3. At present few NFAC managers recognize quality control as one of their primary duties. If NFAC is to prosper, it must be understood at all levels that the central aim of the organization is to produce the best intelligence possible, and all other questions are secondary. This requires constant attention to the product, a certain degree of ruthlessness, and an understanding throughout the organization that careers rise and fall on the quality of the work produced. Good analysts must be seen to be rewarded; poor analysts must be seen to do poorly. Managers at all levels must be enjoined that their future rests on the quality of work that they put forward. This in turn requires, of course, managers who can command the analytic respect of their subordinates and who have no trouble distinguishing good from mediocre work.

4. The policy must be pushed from the highest levels of NFAC and must be pursued consistently. It is sad to say that to do this would create a revolution in the way NFAC now does its business, yet it would almost certainly at the same time create among the analysts themselves a feeling of greater pride in their work.

5. Without a long-term improvement in the quality of the pool of analysts employed by NFAC, ever constant attention to quality control will prove no more than a palliative. For analysts working on the Soviet Union and China, an academic background is obviously essential from the start. But even in these cases, and certainly in the cases of those analysts who deal with other parts

of the world the basic problem is to find people who have a flair for the kind of work required. It probably would be best to recruit young analysts directly upon graduation from college, looking particularly at those young men and women who have had undergraduate journalistic experience or who have been involved in campus or local politics, and are therefore likely to have a "feel" for their subject and an ability to communicate that understanding.

6. It is more likely that good analysts will be found in this group than in a group of recruits hired after years of academic graduate work. Experience has shown that such analysts are frequently set in their intellectual attitudes and have difficulty adapting to the needs of the Agency. The younger analysts, after being vetted by a year or two, can then be sent to graduate school to acquire the necessary expertise and language skills in such areas as the Agency itself designates. This is a more expensive process than that which we now follow, since the Agency would bear the cost of educating the analysts. The salaries of deadwood now in the ranks represent a budgetary drain in excess of this cost.

7. Obviously, this is a long-term project and would not bear fruit for several years. In the interim it would be necessary to cull out those employees recruited directly upon college graduation who in their first year or two at work did not show the requisite analytical skills. To show proper results would require determination on the part of leadership of the Agency and a willingness to wait for results. Those results, however, would almost certainly be greater than any available through a quick-fix program.